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'METRO MAN' SREEDHARAN SAYS HE'S QUITTING ACTIVE POLITICS

The technocrat had unsuccessfully contested the April 2021 Kerala Assembly elections as a BJP candidate from Palakkad

'I FELT SAD WHEN I LOST ELECTION'

E Sreedharan, fondly called the Metro Man for spearheading the Delhi Metro project, said he will continue to serve society. "I am 90 years now. When I say I am quitting active politics, it doesn't mean I am leaving politics," he said, adding that he felt sad when he lost the election. "But, I am not sad now because nothing can be done with one legislator," he added | P7

ANNOUNCEMENT A BIG SETBACK TO BJP

- Sreedharan's decision is a big setback to the BJP, which had projected him to broaden its base in Kerala by reaching out to neutral voters and bringing more professionals to its fold
- It was BJP's national leadership that took the initiative to bring Sreedharan to the party, much to the chagrin of state leaders

3,859 votes

THE MARGIN BY WHICH SREEDHARAN LOST IN THE 2021 KERALA ASSEMBLY POLLS

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

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JPC widens data protection scope

Calls for regulation of social media content

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) report on the Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019, was tabled in Parliament on Thursday, two years after it was first introduced in the Lok Sabha. The report, tabled in the Lok Sabha by BJP member P P Chaudhary, calls for a single regulatory body for personal and non-personal data and a statutory media regulatory authority to regulate social media content.

The JPC report calls for tighter regulation for social media platforms by treating them as publishers who will be regulated for the content they host. It has suggested that no social media platform should be allowed to operate in India unless the parent company handling the technology sets up an office in India.

Notably, the report seeks to widen the scope of the draft legislation by including non-personal data.

Congress MP Jairam Ramesh tabled the Bill in the Rajya Sabha. Many panel members from opposition parties have given dissent notes on Clause 35 of the proposed law, which talks about empowering the Centre and its law enforcing agencies to process data without seeking permission from the individual.

Critics say the suggested changes further undermine the objectives of the Bill by placing economic and state security interests on the same footing as informational privacy. "While recommending that that service shan't be denied to users for want of consent, the report allows for non-consensual processing of data without necessary safeguards. It weakens user rights by carving exceptions for complying with user requests by data fiduciaries," says Internet Freedom Foundation.

According to Chaudhary, who is also the chairperson of the panel, when it comes to sovereignty and integrity of the nation, the government can authorise any agency to process personal data.

Privacy vs national security

Chaudhary claimed the bill has ample safeguards to protect individual privacy but the same cannot override national security

5 new Omicron cases detected in state

NATIONWIDE	DEC 15	DEC 16
Fresh cases	6,984	7,974
Recoveries	8,168	7,948
Deaths	247	343

KARNATAKA	DEC 15	DEC 16
Fresh cases	317	303
Recoveries	301	322
Deaths	2	2

JAB-O-METER
TAKE YOUR SHOT
December 15
51,84,894 doses
December 16
67,90,272 doses
TOTAL DOSES ADMINISTERED
1,35,91,03,572

Over 100 pc first dose coverage in 3 districts

Three districts—Bengaluru Urban, Gadag and Vijayapura —have achieved more than 100 per cent coverage of the Covid-19 vaccination. Five districts are on the verge of achieving 100 per cent first dose coverage and 11 districts have zero Covid-19 cases as of Thursday.

BOSKY KHANNA @ BENGALURU

KARNATAKA on Thursday reported five more Omicron-positive cases, taking the total number of Covid-19 patients having tested positive with the new variant to eight. Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar tweeted about five more people testing positive for Omicron in the state.

Of the five new cases, the youngest is a 19-year old girl and the oldest is a 70-year-old woman. While four are Bengalureans, the fifth, a 52-year-old male, is a resident of Belagavi who landed in Bengaluru for a change-over flight after arriving from Nigeria.

Health Department officials said samples of the 19-year old were collected on December 13. She had a travel history from the United Kingdom and was double-vaccinated with Covishield, but tested Covid-19 positive on arrival. She was immediately rushed to hospital and her samples sent for genome sequencing. The results, released on Thursday, came positive for the Omicron variant.

The Health Department said a 52-year-old man from Belagavi had travelled on the same flight as the 19-year-old, from Nigeria. He too had completed his vaccination doses before being infected by the new variant. "He was screened at the airport, but did not wait for the test results and took a flight to Belagavi. Once his reports came, he was immediately isolated. He has two primary contacts, who are also being tested for Covid-19 and Omicron. The details of his co-travellers are also being ascertained," a senior health official said.

A mother-and-son duo, with travel history from Delhi (no foreign travel) have been found to be Omicron-positive too.

CONTINUED ON: P3

EXPRESS READ

Akhilesh, Shivpal ally before assembly polls

Lucknow: With the UP polls in sight, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Thursday announced an alliance with his uncle Shivpal Singh Yadav's Pragatisheel Samajwadi Party (Lohia).

Trial of new oral Covid drug begins in SA

Johannesburg: Oravax Medical Inc, a subsidiary of US/Israeli pharmaceutical company Oramed, has commenced the first phase of clinical trial of its oral Covid vaccine in South Africa.

WITH THIS ISSUE
CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE
INDULGE
32 PAGES, INCLUDING 16 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)

Father Col K P Singh (retd) mother Uma Singh, wife Geetanajali Singh, daughter Aradhya Singh and other family members pay tribute to Group Captain Varun Singh's mortal remains at Yelahanka Air Force station on Friday | ASHISHKRISHNA HP

'VARUN ASKED RESCUERS TO CALL HIS WIFE, SAVE OTHERS'

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

GROUP Captain Varun Singh of the Indian Air Force, who succumbed to his burn injuries on December 15 at the Command Hospital in Bengaluru, was reportedly conscious after the Mi17 V5 helicopter crashed enroute to Wellington, killing former Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat and 12 others, on December 8.

Speaking to *The New Indian Express* from Bhopal, the late Air Force officer's father Col KP Singh (retd) said that his son had "suffered 95 per cent burn injuries. He had walked out of the (burning) helicopter to the rescuers and identified himself," he said. "Varun gave the rescuers his wife Geetanjali's name and mobile number and requested them to inform her that he was absolutely alright. They called and informed her. That's how I came to know that Varun was on board the helicopter that had crashed. He also told the rescuers that other officers were seriously injured and requested help for them. I was in Mumbai on December 8 and was watching news on TV regarding the crash of Mi17 V5 that was carrying the CDS. There were no immediate details," he added.

EXPRESS EXCLUSIVE

Col Singh (retd) said that Varun was "conscious till he was taken to the military hospital at Wellington. They had to sedate him to ease his pain. It is a routine procedure for patients with severe burn injuries," he added.

Narrating the events of that fateful day, the retired Army officer said that after the rescuers called his daughter-in-law, she called him and told him that Varun was on board the helicopter. "Slowly and gradually, the picture started becoming clearer and we came to know that he was the sole survivor of the crash. That's when we rushed to Wellington. I saw Varun from outside the ICU," said the father.

He said that he was proud of Varun. "I would not like to talk about him in the past tense. He is a great inspiration to many people. He is an excellent son, husband and father. He is a go-getter and a passionate fighter. After last year's incident, whoever I met told me that out of 1,000, 999 test pilots would have bailed out of the aircraft. What Varun achieved in his 17 years of service (in the IAF), many officers don't achieve in 40 years. Everyone should have a son like Varun. He has brought up his children so well," said the bereaved father.

CONTINUED ON: P10

Don't push for compulsory Kannada in colleges: HC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Karnataka High Court on Thursday directed the State Government not to insist on making Kannada a compulsory language in higher education on the basis of implementation of the National Education Policy-2020.

A division bench of Chief Justice Ritu Raj Awasthi and Justice Sachin Shankar Magadum passed the interim order after hearing arguments of the State and Central Governments and also the counsel for the petitioners, who had challenged the State's decision to make Kannada a compulsory language for undergraduate courses.

"Prima facie, we are of the view that the matter with respect to implementation of Kannada as a compulsory subject in higher studies as part of NEP-2020 is a question which requires consideration, and, as such, the State Government, at this stage, should not insist on making the language compulsory till further orders," the court said.

Prior to this, Additional Solicitor General of India M B Naragund, detailing the stand of the Union Government, informed the court that making any language compulsory in a particular state under the NEP would have vast ramifications, and that the Centre has to take a decision in consultation with the state governments in this regard.

CONTINUED ON: P2

Bill for raising marriage age of women

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved a proposal to increase the legal age of marriage for women in India from 18 years to 21 years, setting in motion the process to change a 43-year old norm.

Sources said a Bill in this regard is likely to be brought in Parliament soon. The legal age of marriage in India for women has been 18 years since 1978, while it is 21 years for men.

In June 2020, the government had set up a 10-member committee, headed by politician Jaya Jaitley to examine, among other things, whether the legal age of marriage for women should be raised. Members in the panel included Niti Aayog's Dr V K Paul, secretaries of various ministries and academics Najma Akhtar, Vasudha Kamat and Dipti Shah.

The terms of reference for the panel included examining the correlation of age of marriage and motherhood with health, medical well-being and nutrition of mother and child.

However, women's rights activists were wary of the proposed bill, saying it could end up harming women's cause rather than helping them.

Population Foundation of India, an NGO working in the field of women's reproductive rights, said that increasing women's age of marriage is like "treating symptoms instead of the cause". While concern over early marriage is a step in the right direction, factors like deep-rooted gender inequality, regressive norms and financial insecurity contribute to early and forced marriages, it said.

RAHUL SEEKS MINISTER AJAY MISHRA'S REMOVAL

BJP, however, says dropping a minister for the alleged involvement of his son in a crime will set wrong precedent | P9

Students, jobseekers can soon have certified documents in a jiffy

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

COLLEGE students and job aspirants will soon be able to send their verified documents for free in minutes to universities or prospective employers without having to face the hassles of attestations or verification by the certificate issuing authority.

Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai is expected to launch the e-Sahamati digital platform, developed by the e-Governance Department in association with the National Informatics Centre, by December-end.

The new digital platform will enable citizens to share their academic data and documents which companies and universities need during the recruitment or during admissions to higher education. This will act like a digital verification of documents while eliminating the scope of fake certificates or documentation.

Additional Chief Secretary of e-Governance Department, Rajeev Chawla, said the system is expected to prevent corruption and bring in more transparency. Users can log in using their Aadhaar number and share their data. For this, they have to send a request to the consent manager of e-Sahamathi, who will send the data to the respective companies or universities as sought by the job aspirant or student.

Chawla said that for this, universities and companies will have to register with e-Sahamathi to be able to access the data.

CONTINUED ON: P7

HOW THE PORTAL WILL WORK

- Students wanting to send documents online to potential employers can inform e-Sahamathi through the web portal or mobile app
- They have to give their consent to share academic data with specific employers.
- The consent manager will send that consent artefact and query request to the data fiduciary, which is the department, board or institute that issues the marks card or certificate.
- The encrypted data is then sent to e-Sahamathi, which then shares it with the employer.

CALL FOR ACTION

101 islands in K'taka face threat of climate change, reveals study

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

AS the impact of climate change is already being felt by citizens, with unprecedented and untimely rains even in December, a recent study by experts and government agencies has shown that 101 offshore islands in Karnataka will face the direct impact of climate change if nothing is done. Interestingly, of the 101 islands listed in the report, 47 are not even named.

The report — 'Rapid Assessment of Blue Economy Potential in Karnataka 2021', — prepared by the College of Fisheries under a contract to the World Bank, Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard, Survey of India (SoI), Fisheries Department, National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) and experts — is before the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) for immediate action, since November.

A portion of this report has also been included in the Karnataka State Action Plan on Climate Change-Version 2, prepared by the Environmental Management and Policy Research Institute (EMPRI), which is also before the MoEFCC for implementation since the last six months.

"While the government, at the COP-26 summit, has joined hands to support and protect island nations from the threat of climate change, little attention is being paid to the islands and coastline in India, especially in Karnataka. As the government is keen on encouraging tourism and activities, it is also eager to relax coastal regulation zone (CRZ) norms, which poses a bigger threat," said an expert working with MoEFCC.

Dr A Senthil Vel, Professor and Dean of College of Fisheries, Mangaluru, told The New Indian Express, "There are 1,238 islands in India, of which 120 are in Karnataka, 31 in Lakshwadeep and 340 in the Andaman and Nicobar islands. Of the 120, 101 have been found to be facing climate change threat."

CONTINUED ON: P7

Ramesh sparks row with rape remark in House

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Belagavi

SENIOR Congress leader and former Assembly Speaker K R Ramesh Kumar stoked a controversy after he remarked in the Assembly that 'when rape is inevitable, one should lie down and enjoy it'. His comments drew angry responses from his own party colleagues later in the evening.

Speaker Vishweshwara Hegde Kageri found himself in a fix when MLAs continued to demand more time to speak on the devastation caused by incessant rains and flooding in the state. Kageri asked how he could run the House if every member was to be given time. By then, over 25 members had already spoken on the issue.

Exasperated, the Speaker asked the members to decide on their own. Looking at Ramesh Kumar, Kageri said in a lighter vein, "I have to enjoy the situation and say 'yes, yes'. I should give up trying to control the situation and conduct the proceedings in a systematic manner."

Ramesh Kumar intervened and said, "See, there is a saying — When rape is inevitable, lie down and enjoy it. That's exactly the position you are in."

Instead of opposing the offensive remark, the Speaker and members were heard breaking out into laughter. Later in the evening, Khanapur Congress MLA Anjali Nimbalkar tweeted, "The House shall apologise to entire womanhood, every mother, sister & daughter of this nation for such an obnoxious & shameless behaviour (SIC)."